

The first railroad in Minnesota /

THE FIRST RAILROAD IN MINNESOTA.* BY COL. WILLIAM CROOKS.

* Read at the monthly meeting of the Executive Council, Feb. 8. 1904.

The Minnesota and Pacific Railroad Company was succeeded by the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad Company, and afterward passed under control of the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Railroad Company, which in turn became the Great Northern Railway Company. The St. Paul and Pacific company also controlled a line from St. Paul to Winona, in the valley of the Mississippi.

After the Territorial Legislature had given the charter, and Congress a land grant in aid of the construction of this railroad, the company, by ruling of the Interior Department at Washington, under the grant to Minnesota, was declared entitled to one hundred and twenty sections of land, in advance of construction.

In 1857 the line of railway was located from Stillwater by way of St. Paul and St. Anthony Falls to a point near Big Stone lake, on the western boundary of the State, then about to be admitted to the Union, and was also located from the Falls of St. Anthony to Crow Wing by the way of St. Cloud.

In 1858, under a contract with Mr. Selah Chamberlain, of Cleveland, Ohio, sixty-two and a half miles of the road from St. Paul north were graded and bridged, and the cross ties for a large portion of the line were delivered. The right of way was, in the main, secured by the company. This work, however, was suspended, owing to a battle made by interested or badly disposed people against the faith and credit of the State of Minnesota, rendering powerless the grantees of the State's credit, who held its bonds under the provision of the \$5,000,000 Loan Bill, so called.

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Matters remained in a condition of uncertainty as to the prosecution Of the work upon this and other lines of railroad in 446 the State, until the people, having lost faith, were turning their faces eastward in abandonment of their instituted settlement. It appeared necessary at such a time to make an appeal to the Legislature in order to keep, alive the franchise of the company by providing against forfeiture or merger of its privileges. The company took this appeal in the winter of 1861–61, and the Legislature granted to it an extension of time.

In the meantime, negotiations had been conducted by the Hon. Edmund Rice, who was the head arid front, and the heart and soul, of every effort put forth to rescue the State from a condition which simply meant ruin to all. It was to Mr. J. Edgar Thompson, who at that time was president of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, and to the associates of that gentleman, that Mr. Rice presented plans which sought to induce the active support and co-operation of these gentlemen in carrying the projected lines to a successful issue; and, as a result thereof, Mr. Oliver W. Barnes, a distinguished civil engineer, was sent to Minnesota to examine into the condition of the partially constructed railroad, as well as to equip himself with reliable information concerning the value of the enterprise as a whole.

Mr. Barnes had made a favorable report, and on a Sunday morning, early in May, 1861, Mr. Edmund Rice and myself embarked on the steamer "Golden Era" on our way via La Crosse to Philadelphia for the purpose of conference with the gentlemen there in the hope of consummating an arrangement which would insure the building of the railroad and lay the foundation for the return of some hope to the people of the State. At Philadelphia negotiations were resumed and proceeded in a very satisfactory manner. Governor Alex. Ramsey, then governor of Minnesota, was in Washington and was requested to make the journey to Philadelphia in order to lend his powerful influence in supporting Mr. Rice's efforts, and also to assure Mr. Thompson and his associates that the laws under which the railroad would be built should receive on his part, as executive, most liberal construction. It is needless to say that the governor did in this instance, as in all cases involving the honor and interest of the State of Minnesota, what he deemed best.

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The Hon. John M. Barber of New York, as Mr. Rice's counsel, was also at Philadelphia, assisting in drawing the papers preliminary to the execution of the same by the respective parties, 447 who had agreed upon terms and conditions which seemed to promise the realization of the hopes of the gentlemen controlling the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad Company.

These negotiations carried us along until the early days of June, 1861, and on the eighth day of that month, feeling that we could be spared for a few days, Mr. Rice and myself took the train for New York. We had already, of course, had a warning of danger through the episode of the bombardment of Fort Sumter; but we had received the assurance of our leading statesmen that this was the act only of unruly South Carolina, and that this *emeute* would be put down in ninety days. Such were the expressions of Mr. Seward and others high in the estimation of the people, that gave hope and confidence enough in the future to justify the undertaking of affairs of magnitude.

Arriving in New York at a time of great excitement, we attended to our personal affairs for a couple of days. On the morning of the 11th of June the news of the battle at Big Bethel was handed to us as we were going to breakfast, and the next mail brought letters from Philadelphia, stating that, under the circumstances, all negotiations would have to remain in abeyance indefinitely, because, from appearances, the war might not be ended for many years. And so we were absolutely stranded, hope gone, and apparently nothing to do but return home and meet a disappointed people.

Just at this time, however, I made the acquaintance in New York, quite accidentally, of Messrs. Winters, Harshman, and Drake, residents of Ohio. These gentlemen, with the exception of Mr. Drake, were bankers and capitalists, and were in New York looking for some investment. On account of a long acquaintance with Colonel Andrew De Graff, they were negotiating with him in reference to building the Winona and St. Peter railroad; but, as the colonel informed me that they had not money enough to accomplish all that was necessary in the case of this road, he introduced them to me, believing that I could

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interest them in the construction of the St. Paul and Pacific railroad between St. Paul and St. Anthony Falls.

After consultation with Mr. Rice and conference with the gentlemen aforesaid, an agreement was reached, whereby they were to furnish means of building the railroad from St. Paul to the Falls of St. Anthony. They were to visit St. Paul at an early